The Urban South
in the Great Depression

By ROGER BILES

HISTORIANS CONTINUE TO BE FASCINATED WITH THE QUESTION OF continuity and change in the modern South. Most studies have focused on the years of the nineteenth century following the Civil War—on Reconstruction, Redemption, the fate of the planter class, the putative rise of a new mercantile class, the transitions in southern agriculture, the redefinition of black status through the development of sharecropping and Jim Crow, and a host of other topics— questioning whether the concept of a "New" South accurately portrayed the reality of that era. Understandably, historians have concerned themselves less with the region's cities; after all, the South's urban areas had always been smaller and less important than the industrial behemoths of the Northeast and the Midwest.[1] As W. J. Cash concluded in his seminal *The Mind of the South*, the region's few real cities "were rather mere depots on the road to the markets

[1] On the New South see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, 1951); Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, 1966); Dwight B. Billings, Jr., *Planters and the Making of a "New South": Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, 1979); Jonathan M. Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860–1885* (Baton Rouge, 1978); David L. Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880–1920* (Baton Rouge, 1982); Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978); Patrick J. Hearden, *Independence and Empire: The New South's Cotton Mill Campaign, 1865–1901* (De Kalb, Ill., 1982); Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, *The Industrial Revolution in the South* (Baltimore, 1930); Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York, 1970); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, Eng., and other cities, 1977); Jay R. Mandle, *The Roots of Black Poverty: The Southern Plantation Economy After the Civil War* (Durham, N. C., 1978); James Tice Moore, "Redeemers Reconsidered: Change and Continuity in the Democratic South, 1870–1900," *Journal of Southern History*, XLII (August 1978), 357–78; James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1977); Numan V. Bartley, "Another New South?" *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LXV (Summer 1981), 119–37; James C. Cobb, "Urbanization and the Changing South: A Review of Literature, "*South Atlantic Urban Studies*, I (1977), 253–66; and James C. Cobb, "Beyond Planters and Industrialists: A New Perspective on the New South," *Journal of Southern History*, LIV (February 1988), 45–68.

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of the world, mere adjuncts to the plantation, than living entities in their own right, after the fashion of Boston and New York and Philadelphia."[2]

Yet by the last quarter of the twentieth century the South's cities had mushroomed into sprawling, gleaming metropolises with bustling airports, downtown convention centers, professional sports franchises, and mounting crime rates, proving that a "New" South had, for better or worse, actually arrived. From Atlanta's Peachtree Street to Houston's Galleria, change had become so commonplace that critics, infused with the melancholy spirit of the Nashville Agrarians, lamented the homogenization that destroyed the slower-paced gentility and aesthetic distinctiveness that once characterized Dixie's cities. Now, they grumbled, "modernization" and "progress" had wiped out virtually all remnants of an earlier civilization. The transformation was complete, the only question being when the cities had succumbed.[3]

Historian Blaine A. Brownell contended that an urban ethos had emerged in southern cities by the 1920s, but other students of the question designated the 1930s as the time when sweeping changes engendered by the Great Depression began to close the gap between urban Dixie and its northern counterparts. For example, in his study of the persistent political tradition in southern politics, George B. Tindall concluded that the New Deal "jeopardized" the traditional sources of power in local government and reoriented southern urbanites away from city halls toward the nation's capital. In *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, David R. Goldfield argued generally for the persistent distinctiveness of the region's cities, saying: "But the southern city is different because the South is different. In that region, the city is much closer to the plantation than it is to Chicago and New York." Goldfield noted that change came grudgingly to the urban South, which did not experience sweeping transformation until well into the twentieth century. And yet, admitting that some measure of the South's uniqueness survived to the present, Goldfield also alluded to the impact of the federal government in breaking the grip of tradition in southern cities. Tindall and Goldfield saw Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal as having the unintended effect of initiating long-term changes in the southern urban landscape.[4]

[2] W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), 99.

[3] On the cities of the Sun Belt see Rupert B. Vance and Nicholas J. Demerath, eds., *The Urban South* (Chapel Hill, 1954); David C. Perry and Alfred J. Watkins, eds., *The Rise of the Sunbelt Cities* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1977); Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill, 1981); and Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War Two* (Austin, Texas, 1983).

[4] Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920–1930* (Baton Rouge, 1975); George B. Tindall, *The Persistent Tradition in New South Politics* (Baton Rouge, 1975), 71;

Recent historical studies have noted the limited impact of the New Deal in the cities. In Pittsburgh, Bruce Stave concluded, the New Deal relieved unemployment and improved housing somewhat but had little effect on the more lasting problems of economic stagnation and physical decay. A number of studies suggest that, instead of undermining the strength of the big city political machines, Roosevelt supported those bosses loyal to national Democratic platforms and policies. Charles H. Trout found that "during the entire New Deal period, policies from Washington altered Boston, but just as surely Boston modified federal programs." Richard C. Wade concluded that "the New Deal might have produced a revolutionary rearrangement in formal governmental institutions and agencies, but it left most of the country's urban fabric intact." Or, as Zane Miller summarized, "The federal response to depression in the cities was conservative. The New Deal's urban policy neither envisaged nor produced a radical transformation of metropolitan form and structure."[5]

This study examines the six largest southern cities in 1930—New Orleans, Houston, Atlanta, Dallas, Birmingham, and Memphis (the South being defined as the eleven states of the Confederacy). To what degree did these southern communities alter long-standing traditions to deal with the economic crisis? Did local leaders embrace new political structures or social arrangements? Did local institutions or federal agencies bend more to accommodate the other? In short, did the Old South perish at the hands of federal bureaucrats during the depression decade? The New Deal will be examined in four areas, those of local government, relief, labor, and race relations. In these six cities the federal government exerted little influence on municipal governance. City halls and community elites responded desultorily to the economic upheavals of the 1930s and were committed to balanced budgets and limited relief spending. Opponents of labor unionism continued to be successful. The New Deal in the South, as in other regions, attempted no massive assault on racial discrimina-

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David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607–1980* (Baton Rouge, 1982), 3 (quotation). See also David R. Goldfield, "The New Deal as a Big Deal for Southern Cities," *Newsletter of the North Carolina Institute of Applied History*, III (March 1984), 10–13; and David R. Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," *American Historical Review*, LXXXV (December 1981), 1009–34.

[5] Bruce M. Stave, "Pittsburgh and the New Deal," in John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner, and David Brody, eds., *The New Deal: The State and Local Levels* (Columbus, Ohio, 1975), 376–402; Lyle W. Dorsett, "Kansas City and the New Deal," in Braeman, Bremner, and Brody, eds., *The New Deal*, 407–18; Roger Biles, *Big City Boss in Depression and War: Mayor Edward J. Kelly of Chicago* (De Kalb, Ill., 1984); Charles H. Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal* (New York, 1977), 315 (quotation); Richard Wade quoted in Trout, *Boston*, x; and Zane L. Miller, *The Urbanization of Modern America: A Brief History* (New York, 1973), 168–69. In *The New Deal in the Urban South* (Baton Rouge and London, 1988), Douglas L. Smith makes the case for change during the 1930s.

tion, and the plight of blacks remained essentially unchanged. New Deal largess provided welcome assistance but did not alter traditional institutions. In many essential respects, southern cities responded to the New Deal in much the same way that municipalities did in other regions of the nation—that is, there was more continuity than change.[6]

In the solidly one-party South of the 1930s, the Democrats held sway in all six cities. In each location municipal leaders pledged their fealty to President Roosevelt and observed what became a rite of political orthodoxy by affirming their support of the New Deal. Rhetoric aside, however, the attachment to Washington remained partisan, not ideological. Mindful of the precariousness of a national party allying blacks, labor, the big city's polyglot masses, and a conservative South, the president carefully cultivated the support of Dixie's sachems while overlooking their deviations from official policies. Moreover, he reached a modus vivendi with the region's big city politicos as well as with the gallused demagogues of the backwaters. Liberal backers of Roosevelt and the New Deal found it difficult to acknowledge support for the president from such unsavory southerners as Theodore G. Bilbo and Ellison D. ("Cotton Ed") Smith— just as they blanched at being in league with equally unattractive big city bosses of the Frank Hague and Thomas J. ("Tom") Pendergast ilk. But Roosevelt, always a cold-blooded realist, saw in these various Democrats a source of votes not to be spurned simply for reasons of ideological purity. As long as they delivered their precincts and kept their defalcations to an acceptable limit, disreputable southern Democrats—like their northern counterparts—remained in the president's good graces.[7]

Strains on such a tenuous alliance predictably developed in Memphis, where the local Democratic machine of Edward H. ("Boss") Crump maintained unquestioned hegemony throughout the decade and well into the post–World War II years. First as a congressman and later as a private citizen, the Memphis boss supported all New Deal measures. While serving in the House of Representatives, Crump voted for every Roosevelt-endorsed law, remained unstinting in his praise of the New Deal, and argued that "Roosevelt . . . has done more for the South than any president—aid to the farmers, public works, TVA . . . ." Crump clashed with Roosevelt on occasion and

    [6] U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Population*, I (Washington, 1931), 18.
    [7] On Roosevelt's ties to the South see Frank Freidel, *F.D.R. and the South* (Baton Rouge, 1965); James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal* (Lexington, Ky., 1967); George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913–1945* (Baton Rouge, 1967), chaps. 11–18; and James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, 1956), 135–38, 341–43.

balked at the more liberal New Deal experiments, but he remained loyal because of the largess afforded his machine and the autonomy he enjoyed in presiding over its distribution. City government appropriated very little money, but Crump was empowered to name local relief agents who took charge of dispensing federal funds. Shelby County, which included Memphis, with roughly one-ninth of the state's population, received one-seventh of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) jobs. Over the years the combined enrollments of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), WPA, and Public Works Administration (PWA) brought thousands of jobs to Memphis—jobs that, though created and funded by the federal government, passed into the hands of needy Memphians through the good offices of the Crump organization. Not only did the federal government make no effort to dislodge the local Democratic machine, but its beneficent patronage policy amounted to tacit approval of Mr. Crump and his minions.[8]

Likewise in New Orleans, Roosevelt was willing to associate with a disreputable political machine—in fact, whichever machine appeared to hold the upper hand. Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley, the scion of an old and respected New Orleans family, claimed the support of the local Democratic machine, the "Old Regulars." Indeed, only the opposition of the Old Regulars kept U. S. Senator Huey Long from wielding complete control in Louisiana, so Long used his dominance in the state legislature to wage war against the New Orleans Democrats. As the Long-dominated legislators trimmed aid to the state's leading city, the federal government, mobilizing against the Kingfish, cut back its contributions to New Orleans as well as to other cities in the Pelican State. Mayor Walmsley issued several plaintive appeals to the president, affirming his loyalty and arguing that he and his city were being punished unfairly when Long alone should be disciplined. Roosevelt refused to intervene, and the Old Regulars bolted to Long's faction. Deprived of patronage and cut adrift by his own party, Walmsley became a forlorn figurehead and finally resigned in 1936.[9]

[8] Shields McIlwaine, *Memphis Down in Dixie* (New York, 1948), 379–80 (quotation); William D. Miller, *Mr. Crump of Memphis* (Baton Rouge, 1964), 179–80; Lyle W. Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses* (Port Washington, N. Y., 1977), 40; and Roger Biles, "The Persistence of the Past: Memphis in the Great Depression," *Journal of Southern History*, LII (May 1986), 209–12.

[9] T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York, 1969), 425–27, 675, 849–53; Betty Marie Field, "The Politics of the New Deal in Louisiana, 1933–1939" (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1973), 83–84, 109–12, 286–87; Work Projects Administration, "Administrations of the Mayors of New Orleans, 1803–1936," n.p., March 1940, Louisiana Division (New Orleans Public Library); T. Semmes Walmsley to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 25, 1933, copy of a letter provided to the author by Professor Arnold R. Hirsch. On the history of the Old Regulars in New Orleans see George M. Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans, 1897–1926* (New York, 1936).

After Huey Long's death, those who inherited his organization, principally Governor Richard W. Leche and Lieutenant Governor Earl K. Long, chose Robert S. Maestri to succeed Walmsley. As mayor, according to a contemporary, Maestri "breaks laws, rules, and regulations with high-handed disregard" and even seemed headed for federal prison for income tax evasion. In 1937 he reached a settlement with the Internal Revenue Service, paid $134,000, and was not indicted. Meanwhile, Maestri and Leche quickly mended fences with the Roosevelt administration, and the flow of federal dollars into Louisiana resumed. In the struggle for control of New Orleans's Democratic leadership, Roosevelt sided with the eventual winner, the Old Regulars—despite their connections with Huey Long and their sordid reputation.[10]

In the other four cities conservative elites dominated local governments. In Dallas the drive to bring city hall more firmly under the control of the business community came to fruition in the 1930s. The silk-stocking Citizens Charter Association (CCA) successfully campaigned to replace the mayor-council form of government with a city manager–council arrangement. In 1935 an opposition faction composed of seasoned pols, known as the Catfish Club, bested the CCA to gain control of the city council. In 1937, however, two hundred of the city's corporate presidents and chief executive officers formed the Dallas Citizens' Council to breathe new life into the dying CCA. The initiative was provided by one man, R. L. ("Bob") Thornton. A former tenant farmer who mismanaged several businesses into bankruptcy, Thornton finally struck it rich as a banker and became one of the city's most esteemed philanthropists. By the mid-1930s he had grown tired of the inefficiency of local government and resolved to seize authority for the city's "natural leadership." In 1939 the candidates of the fledgling Citizens' Council parlayed rumors of graft in the incumbent administration into a resounding victory. The council's 1941 slate ran unopposed, and its dominance of local government continued into the 1960s. A local newspaper observed: "In many cities, power descends from a small group of influential businessmen to the city council. What distinguishes the Dallas power group from others is that it is organized, it has a name, it is not articulately opposed and it was highly publicized."[11]

    [10] Don Eddy, "Kingfish the Second," *American Magazine*, CXXVIII (November 1939), 79 (quotation); Field, "The Politics of the New Deal in Louisiana," 286–87; Edward F. Haas, "New Orleans on the Half-Shell: The Maestri Era, 1936–1946," *Louisiana History*, XIII (Summer 1972), 288–99; New Orleans Bureau of Governmental Research, "City Problems Series," No. 46, September 28, 1936, Louisiana Collection (Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans).
    [11] WPA Writers' Project, *Dallas Guide and History* (Dallas, 1940), 193–94; Dallas *Morning News*, January 26, March 23, 27, 1967; transcript of interview with R. L. Thornton, Jr., November 8, 1980, Dallas Mayors Oral History Project (Dallas Public Library); Warren

In Birmingham a fiercely conservative municipal government gave no indication of New Deal influence. With the Ku Klux Klan's endorsement, trucking executive James M. ("Jimmy") Jones, Jr., won the presidency of the three-member city commission in 1925 and held the office until his death in 1940. Relinquishing the support of the hooded empire, Jones drifted into the orbit of the city's preeminent industrial moguls, the Big Mules. He responded to the depression by slashing city services and firing employees—much to the approval of the dominant steel interests. In the early 1930s the other two commissioners mitigated Jones's parsimony, primarily by decreasing the number of firings. The Big Mules fought back, led by Tennessee Coal & Iron's (TCI) Charles F. DeBardeleben, with an extensive propaganda campaign. They lobbied Alabama newspaper editors and financed the reactionary, anti–New Deal weekly magazine, *Alabama*. As a result, the balance of power in the commission swung back to the conservatives in 1937 with the election of Eugene ("Bull") Connor, a renowned radio sportscaster. Fully dominating the commission, Jones reaffirmed local government's defense of segregation, opposition to unionization, and aversion to public housing that, he argued, would undermine the private market for low-rent housing. Though he openly criticized the New Deal infrequently, Jones continued to exert his independence from Washington.[12]

In Atlanta and Houston the linkages between city hall and the central business district may have been less obvious than in Birmingham and Dallas, but they were no less binding. By all accounts, they were a good deal more adhesive than any connections between city hall and Washington, D. C. In Atlanta, James L. Key served as mayor for three consecutive terms from 1930 to 1936—thanks largely to the support of the Chamber of Commerce, Retail Merchants Association, Manufacturers' Association, and Associated General Contractors, all of which endorsed his austerity measures. Disenchanted with what they perceived to be Key's lackluster record, the business community deserted his candidacy in 1936 and supported state legislator William B. Hartsfield, who won after a bitter struggle. As one historian noted: "Though a hotly contested election, instead of changing the direction of local government, Hartsfield's victory

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Leslie, *Dallas, Public and Private* (New York, 1964), 64 (quotation). See also Stanley Walker, *The Dallas Story* (Dallas, 1956), 32–36.

[12] Edward Shannon LaMonte, "Politics and Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama: 1900–75" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976), 135–36; Robert J. Norrell, "Labor at the Ballot Box: Birmingham's Big Mules Fight Back, 1938–1948," unpublished paper given at the Southern Historical Association annual meeting in Louisville, Ky., November 2, 1984, 10–11; "Miracle Man," *Alabama: The News Magazine of the Deep South*, II (May 17, 1937), 4; James M. Jones, Jr., to William B. Hartsfield, June 2, 1938, James M. Jones, Jr., Papers (Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Ala.); Birmingham *Times-Herald*, February 8, 1940.

assured continuity." In office Hartsfield achieved some notoriety by vetoing an ordinance establishing a housing authority and by inviting the red-hunting U. S. House Committee on Un-American Activities to ferret out Communist subversives in Atlanta. In 1940 Hartsfield lost in his bid for reelection to former Chamber of Commerce President Roy LeCraw. In Houston four-time mayor Oscar F. Holcombe faithfully represented the concerns of the local Democracy led by banker and Reconstruction Finance Corporation director Jesse H. Jones. Again business interests were served, and the federal government played no major role.[13]

Indeed, the local governments of these six cities showed no evidence of federal intrusion during the depression decade. The electoral successes of Democrats owed less to Franklin D. Roosevelt's coattails than to traditional regional voting patterns. In most of the cities, firmly entrenched conservative business elites continued to dominate the local polity; in machine-governed cities the New Deal made no effort to unseat the groups in power. Just as the president showed considerable forbearance in his association with a variety of allies in state and national politics, so too did he suffer in silence his relations with southern urban leaders. From Atlanta to Houston, just as in Chicago and Pittsburgh, Roosevelt kept hands off local politics as solidly Democratic administrations returned healthy voting majorities at election time. In the South's largest cities, the New Deal exerted no influence on the composition of community leadership.

To the massive unemployment crisis of the 1930s—both before and after the inception of the New Deal—southern cities responded in an extremely limited fashion. At the outset of the Great Depression southern cities ranked near the bottom in social services generally and in the provision of relief specifically—the continuation of a long-standing tradition that was deeply imbedded by the twentieth century. When the stock market crashed in October 1929, none of the six cities operated municipally funded relief bureaus. From 1916 to 1924 Birmingham administered such a bureau, but it constantly struggled to obtain adequate funding and never received more than

[13] New York *Times*, March 20, 1932; Kesavan Sudheendran, "Community Power Structure in Atlanta: A Study in Decision Making, 1920–1939" (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgia State University, 1982), 117; Douglas Lee Fleming, "Atlanta, the Depression, and the New Deal" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1984), 214 (quotation); William B. Hartsfield to James L. Jones, Jr., July 18, 1938, James M. Jones, Jr., Papers; Atlanta *Constitution*, September 1, 1940; Harold H. Martin, *William Berry Hartsfield: Mayor of Atlanta* (Athens, Ga., 1978), 32; E. Thomas Lovell, "Houston's Reaction to the New Deal, 1932–1936" (M.A. thesis, University of Houston, 1964), 2–3, 168–87; David G. McComb, *Houston: The Bayou City* (Austin, Texas, 1969), 226–27; Houston *Post*, April 19, 1933. In his 1953 study based on Atlanta, Floyd Hunter noted that a permanent economic elite continued to make all important community decisions, primarily working behind the scenes and through surrogate officials. Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Chapel Hill, 1953).

$18,000 a year from city officials. After 1924 the city made a small annual contribution to the Community Chest's family relief agency. Atlanta's government underwrote some of the expense of indigent care at the city's Grady Hospital and contributed to several of the local Community Chest's thirty-nine charitable agencies. In 1929 only the Memphis Community Fund, which had been organized six years earlier through the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce and the Council of Social Agencies, functioned as a welfare agency. In New Orleans a large number of private and sectarian agencies dispensed relief; in Houston and Dallas, Community Chests did the same.[14]

As conditions worsened, manufacturing reductions and business failures led to mounting unemployment rates and wage cuts. The Tennessee Coal & Iron Company, Birmingham's leading employer, lowered wages between 50 and 75 percent by 1933 and threatened workers with dismissal if they protested the policy. Memphis employers adopted a standard thirty-hour work week and pledged not to hire women; between 1929 and 1932 employers in the Bluff City handed over to men approximately 6,000 jobs previously held by women. In Houston the number of unemployed ballooned from 1,100 to nearly 30,000 in slightly more than a year. An Atlanta social worker estimated in 1933 that unemployment rates reached 30 percent citywide and as high as 75 percent in some black neighborhoods. In New Orleans the volume of foreign trade decreased over 50 percent from 1928 to 1933, and federal surveys reported that all industrial concerns reduced their work forces and operated only a few days a week at most. Clearly, though the extent of joblessness and misery may have been greater in such northern cities as Chicago and Detroit, by the winter of 1932–1933 southern cities suffered severely from the weight of the depression.[15]

[14] Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscapers*, 39–44; Blaine A. Brownell, "The Urban South Comes of Age, 1900–1940," in Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, eds., *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, N. Y., and London, 1977), 155; Douglas L. Smith, "The New Deal and the Urban South" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 1978), 239; Fleming, "Atlanta, the Depression, and the New Deal," 47; Memphis Community Fund, "Annual Report, 1940" (Memphis Public Library); Marion Alcorn to Aubrey Williams, April 14, 1934, FERA State Files, 1933–1936, Louisiana 403–420, Field Reports (406), Records of the Works Projects Administration, Record Group 69 (National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D. C.); Houston *Press*, December 4, 1934; Dorothy Dell DeMoss, "Dallas, Texas During the Early Depression: The Hoover Years, 1929–1933" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1966), 29–31; and WPA Writers' Project, *Dallas Guide and History*, 489–90.

[15] Smith, "The New Deal and the Urban South," 35; Biles, "The Persistence of the Past," 188; William E. Montgomery, "The Depression in Houston, 1929–1933," in Robert C. Cotner, ed., *Texas Cities and the Great Depression* (Austin, Texas, 1973), 156; Fleming, "Atlanta, the Depression, and the New Deal," 80–81; Glenn Martin Runyan, "Economic Trends in New Orleans, 1928–1940" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1967), 22; Alice E. Stenholm, "Louisiana: Report of a Field Trip, December 5–12, 1931," State File: Louisiana,

TABLE 1

RELIEF EXPENDITURES BY CITY GOVERNMENT
AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS
January 1 to March 31, 1931

	Municipal ($)	% of Total	Private ($)	% of Total	Total ($)
Atlanta	20,493	26.7	56,183	73.2	76,676
Birmingham	74,544	50.4	73,326	49.6	147,870
Dallas	34,622	48.3	37,109	51.7	71,731
Houston	12,329	20.4	48,224	79.6	60,553
Memphis	11,190	8.8	115,317	91.2	126,507
New Orleans	0	0.0	27,103	100.0	27,103
TOTAL	153,178	30.0	357,262	70.0	510,440

NOTE: Nationwide, local governments provided 60.4% and private sources, 39.6%.
SOURCE: U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Relief Expenditures by Government and Private Orga-
nizations, 1929 and 1931* (Washington, 1932), 6, 32–33.

Faced with unprecedented demands for relief, local governments
responded but not in a substantial way. The six cities contributed
little for relief, roughly half as much as cities did nationally (see
Table 1). Burdened by reduced tax collections, they cut expenditures
to keep from going heavily in debt; this in turn resulted in paltry
appropriations for vital city services. In this regard, Memphis fit the
South's typical pattern of keeping tax rates low and spending modest
amounts on services. The nation's thirty-sixth largest city in 1933,
Memphis spent only $18.21 per capita, placing it sixty-eighth out of
seventy cities with over 100,000 population (see Table 2). From Jan-
uary 1933 until September 1934 Shelby County depended entirely on
federal and state funds for its $2 million emergency relief expendi-
ture. In 1935 Memphis became the last major southern city to estab-
lish a permanent welfare department.[16]

If anything, the other cities proved just as niggardly in their provi-
sion of relief for the unfortunate. As late as 1934 New Orleans could
claim the distinction of being the nation's largest municipality that
did not provide a single penny for family relief; public employee
donations and bond issues constituted the only ways in which city
hall responded. Even after Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley decided to
spend tax dollars for relief, the response was minimal: from January
1933 to December 1935 local funds comprised only 3 percent while
the federal government contributed roughly 97 percent of relief

Records of the President's Organization for Unemployment Relief, Record Group 73
(National Archives).
   [16] U. S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the U. S., 1935* (Washington,
1936), 220–21; Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, February 18, 1935; and Memphis Board of Com-
missioners, "Resolution," December 3, 1935, Folder 9, Box 10, Watkins Overton Papers,
Mississippi Valley Collection (Memphis State University Library, Memphis, Tenn.).

TABLE 2

PER CAPITA EXPENDITURES BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, 1935

	Population Rank	Total ($)	National Rank
Atlanta	31	24.60	58
Birmingham	34	15.58	69
Dallas	33	24.81	57
Houston	24	22.27	60
Memphis	36	18.21	68
New Orleans	16	24.91	56

	Health & Sanitation ($)	National Rank	Charities, Hospitals, & Correctional Fac. ($)	National Rank
Atlanta	2.48	39	2.50	48
Birmingham	1.01	64	0.38	63
Dallas	1.69	55	5.54	32
Houston	1.63	56	1.78	53
Memphis	1.84	50	1.45	55
New Orleans	2.76	32	0.71	60

SOURCE: U. S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the U. S., 1935* (Washington, 1936), 220–21.

funds. To guard against boondoggling and extravagant living by those on the relief rolls, the mayor and other high city officials visited the homes and inspected the automobiles of the needy. Birmingham relief recipients accepted payment in "food checks" redeemable for canned tomatoes, dried beans, potatoes, rice, milk, and shortening—not in cash that, officials felt, might be squandered on nonessential items like liquor and tobacco. Determined to cut spending, tight-fisted Commission President Jimmy Jones said: "I am as much in favor of relief for the unemployables as anyone, but I am unwilling to continue this relief at the expense of bankrupting the City of Birmingham." In a reply to U. S. Senator Hugo Black's query regarding the desirability of increased federal aid to cities for relief, Jones replied negatively.[17]

[17] Alexander Kendrick, "Huey Long's 'Revolution'," *Nation*, CXXXIX (August 22, 1934), 208–9; Robert E. Moran, Sr., "Public Relief in Louisiana from 1928 to 1960," *Louisiana History*, XIV (Fall 1973), 372; Alice E. Stenholm, "Louisiana"; New Orleans Bureau of Governmental Research, "City Problems Series," Numbers 26 and 43, Louisiana Collection; Irving Beiman, "Birmingham: Steel Giant With a Glass Jaw," in Robert S. Allen, ed., *Our Fair City* (New York, 1947), 118; Memorandum, untitled, n.d. (quotation), and James M. Jones to Hugo L. Black, telegram, February 3, 1932, both in James M. Jones, Jr., Papers; *New York Times*, July 25, 1932; and John Williams, "Struggles of the Thirties in the South," in Bernard Sternsher, ed., *The Negro in Depression and War: Prelude to Revolution, 1930–1945* (Chicago, 1969), 173 (quotation).

Mounting debts left cities at the mercy of local banks, which mandated draconian budget cuts and employee layoffs before granting loans. On one occasion Birmingham avoided bankruptcy only because Oscar Wells, head of the First National Bank, approved a $1 million loan to the city. In 1934 only an $800,000 advance from the Coca-Cola Corporation kept Atlanta solvent. To meet payrolls the city issued scrip, which local merchants frequently discounted to a fraction of its intended value. When William B. Hartsfield became mayor in 1937 the city stood over $3 million in debt, and the new chief executive avoided bankruptcy by convincing Robert W. Woodruff, president of Coca-Cola, to provide a loan sufficient to cover one month of the city's $730,000 monthly payroll for 4,000 city employees.[18]

A historian of the depression in Houston noted that the city's responses "were similar to those of the Hoover administration . . . . Both were adherents to the orthodox economic theories of *laissez-faire* and a free market, and both were believers in government frugality and balanced budgets." Indeed, the city ended 1935 with a $386,000 surplus and 1936 with a $75,000 cushion. Similarly, ledger-minded Dallas boasted of balanced budgets achieved by the trimming of operating expenses by $1 million a year. As the monthly case load of the city welfare department rose to an average of 2,800 in 1931, city officials instituted a plan whereby the unemployed labored one day per week on public works projects and were paid as little as eighteen cents an hour. Economy continued to be the first priority.[19]

With municipal governments scrupulously playing a limited role, it fell to private citizens to expand philanthropic activity in existing agencies or to organize ad hoc organizations to meet the crisis. Community Chests increased their budgets and intensified their fund-raising campaigns. Hard times curtailed giving by those fortunate enough to keep their jobs, but much of the resistance to fund-raising for emergency relief stemmed from firmly entrenched ideological objections to the "dole." For whatever reasons, contributions frequently proved disappointing. When, for example, Mayor Walmsley of New Orleans sent out two thousand letters to the city's wealthy launching a charity campaign, he collected only $600 for his efforts. When William Jacobs, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Houston, suggested that the city's problems could be alleviated if

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[18] Beiman, "Birmingham," 115–16; Atlanta *Constitution*, February 2, 1932, December 30, 1934; Martin, *William Berry Hartsfield*, 20; and Fleming, "Atlanta, the Depression, and the New Deal," 222–25.

[19] Montgomery, "Depression in Houston," 153 (quotation), 166; Houston *Post*, January 25, 1936; New York *Times*, August 13, 1934; and Dorothy Dell DeMoss, "Resourcefulness in the Financial Capital: Dallas, 1929–1933," in Cotner, *Texas Cities in the Great Depression*, 124–26.

twenty or thirty millionaires donated $5,000 each, Dr. E. B. West, pastor of the Second Baptist Church, exclaimed, "I do not believe a more dangerous doctrine has ever been preached in a pulpit in Houston." The Dallas *Morning News* editorialized, "The richest of the rich in Dallas have fallen down on the task. They have shirked in the face of the winter's desperate need."[20] And the Memphis Community Fund concluded: "Comparisons with cities both north and south show that the per capita giving in Memphis is low. . . . Our difficulties of financing will continue until the men and women of wealth within our city give more generously of their means to the causes of social welfare than they have been in the habit of doing in the past."[21] The inadequacy of individual efforts was manifest in all six cities.

City halls closely adhered to a policy of low taxes and limited expenditures while striving for balanced budgets. State resources were similarly limited, and the federal government became the last resort. Through FERA's direct relief measures and through public works agencies such as the CWA, PWA, and, most important, the WPA, millions of federal dollars made their way to southern cities. While President Roosevelt's offer of assistance met with eager acceptance, this did not reflect a change in the communities' attitudes toward public welfare. The New Deal meant simply temporary measures to help the beleaguered cities survive hard times.[22]

In some southern cities resistance to an expanded federal presence restricted the amount of aid made available to the poor; often recalcitrant state governments threw up elaborate defenses against what they viewed as excessive New Deal incursions. Governor Eugene Talmadge of Georgia insisted that farmers desperately needed help but that city dwellers were "bums" and "chiselers." As a result, according to WPA field representative Allen Johnstone, Talmadge refused to let FERA administrator Gay Shepperson do her job. Johnstone reported that "days and weeks of delay interrupt the organization and interpretation. Appointments are held up. The Governor insists on signing every check. Wants to know the name and address of every person on staff and almost the name and address of every person on relief. Harasses the administration by continued criticism." Talmadge told Shepperson, in a widely reported remark, that the best way to handle relief applicants would be to "line them up against a wall and give them a dose of castor oil." Conditions

[20] New York *Times*, April 3, 1932; Houston *Post-Dispatch*, October 5, 1931; and Dallas *Morning News*, December 4, 1931.

[21] Memphis Community Fund, "Annual Report, 1931," p. 5 (Memphis Public Library).

[22] A comprehensive discussion of New Deal agencies and programs can be found in William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York, 1963); and Otis L. Graham, Jr., and Meghan Robinson Wander, eds., *Franklin D. Roosevelt, His Life and Times: An Encyclopedic View* (Boston, 1985).

improved when avowed New Dealer Eurith D. Rivers replaced Talmadge in 1936, but a tightfisted legislature undermined Rivers's blueprint for a "Little New Deal." Finally, the state's refusal to raise revenue for matching grants led Roosevelt to terminate all WPA and PWA funds to Georgia.[23]

Resistance to federal control surfaced in other cities as well. New Deal administrators chronicled the opposition they met, as in Birmingham, where Director of Public Welfare Roberta Morgan refused to cooperate fully. FERA regional social worker Loula Dunn reported Morgan's intransigence and added that "the old private agency attitudes and methods still prevail on the whole in the direction of the program, and I sometimes question how able we will ever be to make any real progress in Birmingham." FERA representative Elmer Scott similarly noted the desire of Houston's leaders to accept outside aid without shouldering any responsibilities in turn; it shocked him "how parasitic a local community may become." In a moment of candor, the Houston *Press* acknowledged the hypocrisy of its city's reliance on states rights dogma, saying: "We recognized state boundaries when we were called on to give, but forget them when Uncle Sam is doing the giving."[24]

In Memphis the refusal to supplement federal spending underscored the unchanged priorities of community leaders. In 1937 Memphis allocated one-tenth of 1 percent of its budget for charities, while authorizing more than that for recreation. WPA chief Harry L. Hopkins accused Memphis of shirking its duty, a charge that Mayor Watkins Overton denied by arguing that Memphis had done yeoman work in 1931–1932 before the federal government became involved. Hopkins rejected this argument, which apparently did not bother Overton at all. As one historian noted, Democratic boss Edward H. Crump and Overton "applauded the involvement of Washington in welfare while organizing a local relief apparatus only marginally sympathetic to the jobless and indigent." Elmer Scott observed, "Memphis gave the distinct feeling that a warm welcome was extended to government concerning itself with the plight of the unemployed, and paying the bills—as long as it is the *Federal* govern-

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[23] Allen Johnstone to Harry Hopkins, September 18, 1933, FERA State Files, 1933–1936, Georgia 401.2–420, Field Reports (406), RG 69; Jane Walker Herndon, "Ed Rivers and Georgia's 'Little New Deal'," *Atlanta Historical Journal*, XXX (Spring 1986), 99–103 (quotation on p. 99); and "PWA and Georgia: The State's No-Debt Policy Rouses the President's Ire," *Newsweek*, XII (December 5, 1938), 12.

[24] "Service to Humanity: The Career of Roberta Morgan," Folder 12, Box 1, Roberta Morgan Papers (Birmingham Public Library Archives); Loula Dunn to Robert P. Lansdale, October 19, 1934, FERA State Files, 1935–1936, Alabama 401.3–420, Field Reports (406), and Marion Alcorn to Aubrey Williams, April 9, 1934, FERA State Files, 1933–1936, Texas 401.2–410, Field Reports (406), both in RG 69; and Houston *Press*, March 23, 1936 (Scott quotation).

TABLE 3

Relief Benefits by City, July 1934–June 1935

	Population Rank	Average Relief Benefits Per Family Per Month ($)
Atlanta	31	21.13
Birmingham	34	17.11
Dallas	33	16.38
Houston	24	17.56
Memphis	36	21.97
New Orleans	16	28.46
	Average =	20.44
Akron, Ohio	35	29.08
Columbus, Ohio	27	28.09
Denver, Colorado	30	36.24
Providence, Rhode Island	37	35.94
St. Paul, Minnesota	32	41.75
Toledo, Ohio	28	26.70
	Average =	32.96

SOURCE: Arthur E. Burns, "Federal Emergency Relief Administration," in Clarence E. Ridley and Orin F. Nolting, eds., *The Municipal Yearbook, 1937* (Chicago, 1937), 415–16.

ment. The local city and county government thus also welcomes absolution from responsibility—moral or financial."[25]

Paltry allotments to relief recipients in southern cities further underscored community priorities. The federal government divided the nation into four regions to establish variable WPA pay rates approximating local standards. The southeastern region, including Atlanta, Birmingham, and Memphis, received the lowest monthly stipends; the southwestern region (New Orleans, Dallas, and Houston) fared slightly better, and the Northeast was the most generously endowed region. Certainly relief stipends fell short of desirable levels nationwide, but southern urban welfare beneficiaries suffered most, receiving from 33 to 65 percent of the national average "emergency standard of living expense" identified by federal authorities. New Deal officials reported that WPA wages for Atlanta's unskilled workers, adjusted for cost of living, constituted the lowest in the nation and that the rates in other Dixie municipalities were comparable (see Table 3). Bitter Atlanta unionists referred to the local dispen-

[25] Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, February 18, 1935; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Financial Statistics of Cities Over 100,000 Population, 1937* (Washington, 1940), 186–87; Smith, "The New Deal and the Urban South," 264–65 (first quotation); Elmer Scott to Harry Hopkins, April 15, 1934, Harry L. Hopkins Papers, Box 60, Folder "Tennessee Field Reports, 1933–1936," Group 24 (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N. Y.) (second quotation).

sation of relief as "legalized peonage."[26]

Indeed, substandard pay rates, the implacability of state and local officials, the miserly contributions to public relief, the nearly absolute reliance on federal funds, and the testimony of New Deal officials all point to a dubious record on the part of southern cities. These municipalities did establish, for the first time, permanent, publicly funded welfare bureaus but, according to a study of Birmingham that seems to reflect attitudes in the other cities as well, "not because of any conviction of the public at large that relief was a responsibility of the whole people rather than a philanthropy to be supported by a few individuals; rather . . . because of the availability of federal funds through a public department." Responding tardily and sparingly, local officials and charity-minded citizens kept their faith in a fiscal orthodoxy that preached the virtues of a balanced budget. The acceptance of New Deal funds provided a way to cleave to these hallowed notions while temporarily expanding relief coverage. When direct relief by the federal government was terminated by the creation of the WPA in 1935, local officials made no move to take up the slack; without federal funds, relief virtually vanished (see Table 4).[27]

As tables 1, 2, and 3 indicate, these southern cities continued to provide relief in lesser amounts than did other cities in the nation. They placed decidedly lower in per capita relief expenditures than in national population rank and paid lower relief amounts than did cities in other regions. As a result, the indigent in these southern cities relied more on private than municipal aid—whereas the opposite prevailed nationwide. Southern cities accepted federal funds as a temporary expedient, but this concession certainly did not acknowledge any need to change the southern customs, attitudes, and institutions related to providing relief to the poor. Far from being infused with any new spirit of social welfare, these six southern cities seem not to have altered their policies on indigent care at all during the depression years.

Whether entirely intended or not, the New Deal had a profound impact on labor unions by means of such landmark pieces of legislation as Section 7a, which authorized workers to organize and bargain on their own behalf, of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), and the Fair Labor Standards Act. Labor's successes in the 1930s not only activated a listless

[26] Smith, "The New Deal and the Urban South," 225–26; Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York, 1943), 178; and Michael S. Holmes, "The New Deal in Georgia: An Administrative History" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1969), 213, 237.

[27] Anita Van de Voorf, "Public Welfare Administration in Jefferson County" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1935), 99.

TABLE 4

Sources of Funding for Relief Programs, 1935–1936

City and Time		Total Spent on Relief ($)	Federal Dollars Spent on Relief	Percent of Total from Federal Sources
Atlanta	1935	5,910,810	5,051,153	85.5
	1936	0	0	0
Birmingham	1935	5,452,319	5,072,506	93.0
	1936	140,209	51,996	37.1
Dallas	1935	1,776,400	1,429,494	80.5
	1936	0	0	0
Houston	1935	2,422,159	1,931,037	79.7
	1936	0	0	0
Memphis	1935	2,280,031	2,123,861	93.2
	1936	0	0	0
New Orleans	1935	9,241,949	8,973,956	97.1
	1936	0	0	0

SOURCE: Works Projects Administration, *Final Statistical Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration* (Washington, 1942), 327, 335, 343, 374, 376, 377.

American Federation of Labor (AFL) but led industrial unionists to break away from the craft union–controlled AFL to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Both organizations won notable victories resulting in recognition, collective bargaining, and improved wages and conditions, but they met stiff resistance in the South. Well-publicized violence erupted in the coal mines of Harlan County, Kentucky, the textile villages of the Carolina Piedmont, and the cotton fields of plantation Arkansas; and staunch opponents of the closed shop, higher wages, and employee rights manned the barricades in urban factories as well. Determined to protect regional wage scales, which presumably gave southern industrialists a competitive boost, and threatened by rumors of Communist influence and racial mixing in the CIO, big city governments curtailed civil liberties and employed violence as readily as did rural elites. With a few exceptions, organized labor's foes in these six cities enjoyed considerable success.[28]

Without question, organized labor's greatest breakthrough in the South occurred in Birmingham in 1937 when the United States Steel

[28] The standard treatment of labor's struggles in the 1930s remains Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933–41* (Boston, 1970). On southern attitudes toward labor see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, especially Chap. 8; Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 351, 523; Cash, *Mind of the South*, 296–99; and F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 24–36.

Corporation, parent company of the Tennessee Coal & Iron firm, signed a collective bargaining agreement with the CIO-affiliated Steel Workers' Organizing Committee (SWOC). This action brought more than twenty thousand steel workers in Birmingham and its suburbs under union-management agreement. TCI disbanded its company union, and in 1941 SWOC obtained exclusive bargaining rights within the city's steel industry. Although obtaining recognition from the city's leading employer constituted a notable achievement, it would be wrong to conclude that resistance to industrial unionism in Birmingham had been crushed. After all, the union prospered locally only because of a national settlement, and membership remained small. Immediately the chairman of Republic Steel rushed to Birmingham to assert that his company had no intention of following U. S. Steel's lead in bowing to organized labor. The city's police chief announced his intention to quash all strikes and responded to the criticism his remarks provoked by saying that "communist ravings from New York are like so much water on a duck's back." A resurgent Ku Klux Klan terrorized a minister who allowed United Mine Workers organizers to meet in his church. In 1937 James Simpson, a state senator from Birmingham, wrote and helped steer through the legislature a bill prohibiting picketing; in 1939 he rewrote the state's unemployment compensation law to disallow benefits for striking workers. If anything, TCI's pathbreaking concession in 1937 seemed to stiffen resistance to organized labor. In 1940 the local Chamber of Commerce grudgingly admitted that unions had made some gains in their city of late but countered that "the district is still open shop and indications are it will remain so."[29]

Opposition throughout the South to the CIO was caused largely by the union's putative racial liberalism, and resistance was especially stiff in Birmingham where approximately 41 percent of the steelworkers, 56 percent of the ore miners, and 63 percent of the coal miners were black. In 1933 only three or four of Birmingham's unions had listed any black membership. There were a few small, separate locals of black plasterers and musicians, and a handful of black bricklayers and postmen belonged to unions. But by the end of the decade recruitment efforts by the United Mine Workers, the Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, and the SWOC increased black membership in the unions, perhaps to as much as 30 percent.[30]

[29] Lucy Randolph Mason, *To Win These Rights: A Personal Story of the CIO in the South* (New York, 1952), 62; Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 186; George R. Leighton, "Birmingham, Alabama: The City of Perpetual Promise," *Harper's Magazine*, 175 (August 1937), 241; New York *Times*, August 2, August 5, 1937, p. 18, col. 3 (first quotation); Norrell, "Labor at the Ballot Box," 15; and Billy Hall Wyche, "Southern Attitudes Toward Industrial Unions, 1933–1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1969), 61 (second quotation).

[30] Norrell, "Labor at the Ballot Box," 7–8; Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black*

The southern headquarters of the Communist party were located in Birmingham, and that presence explains why charges were frequently made about Communist influence on labor activities there. Membership in the party never exceeded about 250 (most of whom were black), but the local branch office published a widely circulated newspaper, *Southern Worker*, and the Communist-funded International Labor Defense kept a high profile. Fear of radicalism led to violent retribution by the Ku Klux Klan, American Legion, White Legion, Silver Shirts, and Alabama Blackshirts. The Birmingham police department formed a "red squad," led by a private detective who was paid by TCI and Republic Steel, to harass Communists and labor leaders. The city's official labor newspaper, *Southern Labor Review*, blamed local authorities for attempting to "'pass the buck' for 'so many strikes' and 'so much disorder' to the Communists. . . . The purpose of the operators is to get the people's attention on the so-called Communists so they will not see the real cause of the trouble . . . ." Fueled by the fear of radicalism as well as by an aversion to integration, Birmingham's leaders continued to fight a rear-guard action even after the unionization of the redoubtable TCI.[31]

Labor's widely heralded victory in the Birmingham steel mills did not result in a city-wide capitulation on the part of civic and business leadership, nor did news of the breakthrough for organized labor lead to massive changes elsewhere. A few isolated victories for labor attracted attention, principally because they were unique in the South. For example, the United Auto Workers (UAW) staged the auto industry's first sit-down strike in Atlanta's Fisher Body and Chevrolet plants. Precipitated by management's threat to fire two workers for wearing union buttons, the sit-down lasted only one night, and picketing resumed outside the plants when General Motors agreed not to produce prior to a strike settlement. The UAW held out for over three months in the unusually snowy winter of 1936–1937, and membership in the previously tiny organization increased. The Atlanta *Con-*

Workers and the New Unions (Chapel Hill, 1939), 315, 328; Herbert R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York, 1944), 33, 45; and Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American History*, LXXIII (December 1986), 672–80.

[31] Cayton and Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions*, 337–41; Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 183; U. S. Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, 75 Cong., 1 Sess., Pursuant to S. Res. 266, "Hearings on Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor Before a Sub-Committee on Education and Labor," Part 3, p. 762; *Southern Labor Review*, May 9, 1934. See also William R. Snell, "Masked Men in the Magic City: Activities of the Revised Klan in Birmingham, 1916–1940," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XXXIV (Fall and Winter 1972), 206–27; Bruce Crawford, "Bullets Fell on Alabama," *Nation*, CXLI (September 18, 1935), 319–20; Thomas A. Krueger, *And Promises To Keep: The Southern Conference For Human Welfare, 1938–1948* (Nashville, 1967), 10–21; and Robert P. Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham During the 1930s," *Journal of Southern History*, XLVII (November 1981), 521–44.

stitution condemned the sit-down tactic and praised the AFL for refusing to employ it. The strike ended in union recognition, and thus a symbolic victory for the CIO, but the success was isolated. From 1935 to 1938 only twenty-four strikes broke out in the city, with no resultant increases in prevailing pay scales. As a historian of depression-age Atlanta concluded, "Though the Wagner Act bolstered Atlanta's unions, they still remained small in numbers and strength in 1940."[32]

Community leaders committed to the preservation of open shops worked assiduously to minimize the influence of labor organizers. The local Chamber of Commerce boasted that Dallas "was one of the first open shop cities of the country" and advertised nationally the virtues of the city's docile labor force. It adduced: "The percentage of foreign born is negligible. From these vast labor resources Dallas industries may draw an unlimited supply of native, intelligent labor, easily trained, loyal and efficient." The chamber's "Open Shop Bureau" took an active role in politics, supporting anti-union candidates. The Dallas Open Shop Association, formed in 1919 by a coterie of local businessmen, guaranteed the solvency of all its members in case of work-stopping strikes through the use of a rumored two-to-three-million-dollar reserve fund. Furthermore, it subjected any member who knowingly hired union workers to a $3,000 fine. The success of the business community in safeguarding the open shop resulted in total capitulation by the local AFL leadership, as witnessed by the Central Labor Council offering to help the Chamber of Commerce keep the CIO out of the community. In Memphis, Ed Crump so tightly controlled the AFL-affiliated unions in the Trades and Labor Council that they too enlisted in the anti-CIO crusade. The boss used the radical specter of the CIO to lure industry to Memphis by promising that local authorities would keep the dreaded unions from gaining a foothold there. Several firms built large plants in Memphis after receiving the promise of the local Chamber of Commerce, as well as the covert assurances of the city administration, that the CIO would be kept out.[33]

When all else failed, municipal officials resorted to violence. In Memphis local officials drew the battle lines at the entrances of the

[32] Neil Herring and Sue Thrasher, "UAW Sit-down Strike: Atlanta, 1936," in Marc S. Miller, ed., *Working Lives: The* Southern Exposure *History of Labor in the South* (New York, 1980), 173–79; Atlanta *Constitution*, February 7, 1937; Mason, *To Win These Rights*, 34–36; and Fleming, "Atlanta, the Depression, and the New Deal," 350 (quotation).

[33] Dallas Chamber of Commerce, "The Dallas Market," *Dallas*, 1941 (Dallas Public Library), 12 (first quotation), 13 (second quotation); New York *Times*, January 5, 1930, sec. 3, p. 1; George Lambert, "Dallas Tries Terror," *Nation*, CXLV (October 9, 1937), 377; and Roger Biles, "Ed Crump Versus the Unions: The Labor Movement in Memphis During the 1930s," *Labor History*, XXV (Fall 1984), 533–52.

city's auto-related concerns (Ford Motor Company and Firestone Tire and Rubber Company). Norman Smith, a veteran UAW organizer, was viciously beaten on two occasions by unknown assailants. Despite strenuous protests by the American Civil Liberties Union and the identification of the thugs by several eyewitnesses, the police made no arrests. When Smith recovered sufficiently, the UAW recalled him to its national headquarters—a move symbolic of the union's failure to crack the Ford fortress. Within a few months Crump triumphantly boasted that "everyone has forgotten the CIO down this way. Don't hear anything about it." In 1940 the relative calm of the previous two years evaporated as the United Rubber Workers (URW) trained its guns on the city's Firestone plant, the largest unorganized rubber factory in the nation. An anti-union mob brutally pummelled a URW spokesman, and the organizing campaign faltered. At the close of 1940 the CIO's failure to organize the workers at Firestone, punctuated by the equally fruitless efforts at Ford, kept the vast majority of Memphis's unskilled work force free from the influence of industrial unionism.[34]

In Atlanta the CIO met equally stiff opposition. The 1934 General Strike by the United Textile Workers ignited sparks throughout Georgia, and strikers in Atlanta closed all ten of the city's cotton mills. Three female pickets at the Exposition Cotton Mill sued the company's executive vice-president for running them down with his car. Another picketer died after being hit by a runaway auto at the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill. Police teargassed an estimated one thousand strikers who refused to clear the Southern Railroad tracks near the Exposition plant. The strike raged in the midst of the state's gubernatorial primary, an unpropitious moment for incumbent Eugene Talmadge, who promised that he would "never use the troops to break up a strike." On the very night of the primary, however, Talmadge called out the state's entire four-thousand-man National Guard and declared martial law. Guardsmen beat and bayoneted the strikers and then sent them to a makeshift internment camp at Fort McPherson. The governor released the 16 women and 119 men picketers, who had been kept in a barbed-wire enclosure for several days, when the strike ended. The General Strike failed totally, and the Atlanta mills

[34] Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, September 22, 23, 1937; Miller, *Mr. Crump of Memphis*, 215; Mason, *To Win These Rights*, 104–5; E. H. Crump to Kenneth D. McKellar, April 6, 1938, Crump-McKellar Correspondence, Box 3, Kenneth D. McKellar Papers, Memphis–Shelby County Archives, Memphis Public Library (quotation); Roger Biles, "Ed Crump Versus the Unions," 543–46. One theory identified the assailants as Pinkerton agents employed by the Ford Motor Company. See John Clarence Petrie, "Memphis Makes War on CIO," *Christian Century*, LIV (October 13, 1937), 1273–74; and Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, August 25–30, December 24, 1940.

reopened with no change in their rigid open shop policy.[35]

In New Orleans and Houston labor conflict centered almost exclusively on the racially charged battle to control the docks. In New Orleans the city council adopted an ordinance stipulating that only certified registered voters be employed on the waterfront. Black longshoremen descended upon City Hall to protest, and in response city council passed a revised ordinance requiring a two-year-old poll tax receipt as a precondition for employment, which still prevented blacks from working on the docks. To circumvent Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the New Orleans Steamship Association organized separate company unions for whites and blacks. By the end of the 1930s, the 700 white longshoremen worked regularly; the 2,100 black members, who each paid higher dues, did not. The Houston Ship Channel became the locus of periodic violence, and several people were killed in gunfights between picketers and strikebreakers. Labor won few victories, however. In 1931, for example, a longshoremen's union called a strike when steamship operators lowered wages from eighty to sixty-five cents per hour. After three weeks of bitter fighting, the strikers accepted seventy cents per hour and resumed work.[36]

As countless episodes in these six localities demonstrate, there was a large amount of union activity in southern cities in the 1930s. The violence triggered by CIO organizing efforts made it clear that local authorities believed that unions threatened established southern labor relations. Labor recorded some notable victories—in the case of the Birmingham steel mills, the victory was due to a national agreement; but in other instances, such as in the Atlanta auto factories, local efforts won the day. Nonetheless, the major breakthroughs for the CIO would come in the next decade. This belated success, achieved earlier in other parts of the nation, was forestalled by the persistent efforts of local authorities like Memphis's Ed Crump and organizations like the Dallas Open Shop Association. As F. Ray Marshall concluded in his comprehensive survey of southern labor, "in spite of considerable ferment during the 1930s, southern union membership was concentrated mainly in the older AFL unions and the railway

[35] Atlanta *Constitution*, September 5–23, 1934; and John E. Allen, "The Governor and the Strike: Eugene Talmadge and the General Strike, 1934" (M.A. thesis, Georgia State University, 1977), 2 (quotation), 3, 112–26.

[36] Daniel Rosenberg, "Race, Labor and Unionism: New Orleans Dockworkers, 1900–1910" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1985), 303; Robert C. Francis, "Longshoremen in New Orleans," *Opportunity*, XIV (March 1936), 84; Carroll G. Miller, "A Study of the New Orleans Longshoremen's Unions from 1850 to 1962" (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1962), 30–31, 36–37; Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro*, 149–50; New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, July 2, 1938; Herbert R. Northrup, "The New Orleans Longshoremen," *Political Science Quarterly*, LVII (December 1942), 544; Houston *Post-Dispatch*, October 1, 22, 1931; and Lovell, "Houston's Reaction to the New Deal," 77.

TABLE 5
POPULATION AND RACIAL COMPOSITION, 1930

	Total Population	Blacks (%)
Atlanta	270,366	90,075 (33.3)
Birmingham	259,678	99,077 (38.2)
Dallas	260,475	38,742 (14.9)
Houston	292,352	63,337 (21.7)
Memphis	253,143	96,550 (38.1)
New Orleans	458,762	129,632 (28.3)

SOURCE: U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States, 1920–32* (Washington, 1935), 54.

brotherhoods." And George B. Tindall could well have been speaking of the region's cities when he observed that southern organizing campaigns "assumed . . . the character of guerrilla actions punctuated by occasional victories," implying that, despite nominal gains in membership and the laying of a foundation for future growth, "the South remained predominantly nonunion and largely antiunion."[37]

Blacks in these six southern cities were the victims of a rigid racial caste system, were saddled with the lowest-paying jobs, and suffered disproportionately from the ravages of the economy's collapse (see Table 5 for the size of the black population in the six cities). Traditionally "last hired and first fired," blacks had unemployment rates that dwarfed those for whites. In each of the six cities, in comparison with white residents, blacks were less likely to own their homes (and more likely to own homes of less value when they did so), shared their living units with more persons, and more of them occupied dilapidated structures. They endured the indignities of a Jim Crow system of segregation still in its prime, experienced political powerlessness based upon systematic disfranchisement, and, though lynchings occurred less frequently than previously, fell victim to a campaign of violence and intimidation designed to preserve white supremacy. The New Deal supplied relief but always under the watchful eye of local authorities. Federal money helped a good number of destitute blacks survive, a considerable accomplishment given the tenor of the times, but it caused no changes in the racial caste system.[38]

[37] Smith, "The New Deal and the Urban South," 519–22; Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 222; and Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 515, 522.

[38] Roger Biles, *Memphis in the Great Depression* (Knoxville, 1986), 92–93; Smith, "The New Deal and the Urban South," 38; James Martin SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven': The Black Community in Houston, Texas, 1917–1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1980), 133; Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of Negroes in Texas, 1528–1971* (Austin, Texas, 1973), 154–55; Randy J. Sparks, "'Heavenly Houston' or 'Hellish Houston'? Black Unemployment and Relief Efforts, 1929–1936," *Southern Studies*, XXV (Winter

Jim Crow continued to flourish as public accommodations remained separate and unequal. Public school systems kept black and white pupils strictly segregated and appropriated far fewer resources for the education of blacks than for whites. In Birmingham, for example, white teachers earned an average annual salary of $1,466 and black teachers only $682. In Atlanta the average pupil expenditure for white students stood at $95.20 but at $30.55 for black students. Public parks and playgrounds also bore the stamp of Jim Crow, as in Houston, where blacks had access to only one of twenty-seven municipal parks and one of ten playgrounds. In that Texas city an ordinance mandated separate seating on buses, but some drivers refused to take any black passengers at all; in Birmingham streetcars, large movable partitions clamped on the backs of seats erected barriers between black and white seating areas. Taxicabs operated by whites refused black passengers, and only "Harlem cabs" accepted black fares. The Atlanta City Council passed a barbershop segregation law preventing black barbers from serving whites. Some real estate agents protested, fearing loss of money if black-owned shops closed, and the Atlanta *Constitution* noted that blacks serving whites did not violate accepted customs. The city council reconsidered and adopted a weaker law that only prohibited black barbers from serving white women and children.[39]

Segregated housing prevailed, by custom if not by legal fiat. In the 1920s Atlanta, Birmingham, and New Orleans all adopted residential segregation statutes to assure the separation of the races, but the U. S. Supreme Court decision of *Smith v. Atlanta* in 1926 ruled the practice illegal. In 1926 the Texas Court of Civil Appeals abrogated a Dallas residential segregation law, but Dallas legislators led a successful fight for a new state law that produced segregation by permitting municipal control over building permits. In all of the cities blacks inhabited the most undesirable topographical areas, con-

1986), 353–66; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States, 1920–32* (Washington, 1935), 277–81. On the impact of the New Deal on blacks see Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York, 1978); John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era: Liberalism and Race* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1980); Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery* (Westport, Conn., 1970); Richard Sterner, *The Negro's Share: A Study of Income, Consumption, Housing and Public Assistance* (New York, 1943); Ralph J. Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR* (Chicago, 1973); Allen F. Kifer, "The Negro Under the New Deal, 1933–1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1961); and Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., "The Negro in the New Deal Era," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XLVIII (Winter 1964–1965), 111–26.

[39] Charles S. Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York, 1943), 22, 50; Marcia E. Turner-Jones, "A Political Analysis of Black Educational History: Atlanta, 1865–1943" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1982), 194; Jesse O. Thomas, *A Study of the Social Welfare Status of the Negroes in Houston, Texas* (Atlanta, 1929), 93–94; SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven'," 97; and Sudheendran, "Community Power Structure in Atlanta," 280–82.

signed to the least coveted land near swamps, creeks, bayous, main railroad lines, spur lines, terminals, and manufacturing areas. Unlike the situation in most northern cities, where blacks succeeded other immigrant groups and formed expansive ghettos in the inner city adjacent to downtowns, land in southern cities was usually set aside for scattered black housing sites. Therefore, blacks clustered in neighborhoods like "Slippery Log Bottoms," "Queen Bee Bottoms," and "Shinertown" in Memphis; "Beaver Slide" and "Tanyard Bottom" in Atlanta; "Elm Thicket" and "Oak Cliff" in Dallas; and "Tuxedo Junction" in Birmingham.[40]

Keenly aware of the severe socioeconomic limitations imposed upon them, blacks found no hope for amelioration in the political realm. Primarily through the use of Jim Crow laws but also through force and intimidation, municipal government disfranchised thousands of potential black voters. In Texas the white primary formed the principal hurdle. In 1936 a group of the state's most influential blacks, including Antonio Maceo Smith and Maynard H. Jackson of Dallas and Clifford Richardson and Richard R. Grovey of Houston, organized the Progressive Voters League to foster black political activism. Their principal goal continued to be the repeal of the white primary law, but they enjoyed no success in the 1930s. Not until 1944 did the U. S. Supreme Court rule the white primary unconstitutional in the landmark *Smith v. Allwright* decision. In Dallas and Houston, therefore, few blacks voted or even paid their poll taxes—only 3,400 in Dallas in 1938 and 400 in Houston in 1935.[41]

State legislatures in Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia utilized a variety of methods to bar blacks from voting, including poll taxes, grandfather clauses, understanding clauses, literacy tests, and property requirements, in addition to white primaries. Of the 117,347 registered voters in New Orleans in 1930, only 2,128 were black; by 1940 only 609 blacks remained on the rolls. In Birmingham blacks

[40] Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation*, 176; Brownell, *Urban Ethos in the South*, 183–84; "The Atlanta Zoning Plan," *Survey*, XLVIII (April 22, 1922), 114–15; Birmingham Zoning Commission, "Zoning Ordinance of Birmingham, Alabama: Effective August 4, 1926," n.p., n.d., Department of Southern History (Birmingham Public Library); Michael L. Porter, "Black Atlanta: An Interdisciplinary Study of Blacks on the East Side of Atlanta, 1890–1930" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1974), 27; Barr, *Black Texans*, 140; Robin Flowerdew, "Spatial Patterns of Residential Segregation in a Southern City," *Journal of American Studies*, XIII (April 1979), 96–100; Rayburn W. Johnson, "Land Utilization in Memphis" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1936), 50–52; Dorothy Slade, "The Evolution of Negro Areas in the City of Atlanta" (M.A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1946), 23–28; James K. Howard, "An Economic and Social History of Dallas, Texas" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1956), 39; and Otis Dismuke, "The Other Side: The Story of Birmingham's Black Community," n.p., n.d. (University of Alabama in Birmingham Library).

[41] Robert Haynes, "Black Houstonians and the White Democratic Primary, 1920–1945," in Francisco A. Rosales and Barry J. Kaplan, eds., *Houston: A Twentieth Century Urban Frontier* (Port Washington, N. Y., 1983), 122–37; SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven'," 172–94, 300–307; Barr, *Black Texans*, 136; and Bunche, *Political Status of the Negro*, 466.

made up roughly 38 percent of the population but less than 2 percent of the electorate. In Atlanta, where a variety of civic and church groups in the black community had worked feverishly during the decade to counter disfranchisement, the number of black registered voters increased only from 500 in 1930 to 1,500 in 1940, and fewer actually voted because they were unable to pay their poll taxes. Only in Memphis did large numbers of blacks exercise the franchise—and then only at the sufferance of the omnipotent Crump machine. Crump used the state's poll tax to his advantage by paying the levy for black voters, keeping the receipts until election day, and then distributing them to "reliable" voters. Blacks voted in Memphis in greater numbers than anywhere else in the South, but their votes were controlled by a white political machine.[42]

The political powerlessness of blacks reflected their vulnerability in all areas of life in the 1930s. Periodic violence and sustained persecution of blacks unwilling to adhere to prescribed behavioral roles served as grim reminders of white supremacy. Although the Ku Klux Klan had disappeared in most places by the mid-1920s, it continued to operate on a reduced scale in Birmingham and Dallas in the 1930s. As late as 1939 the Atlanta Klan, six hundred strong, paraded in front of the offices of the Atlanta *Constitution* to protest the newspaper's editorial policies. For several months in 1930, another paramilitary organization, the Black Shirts, led the crusade for white supremacy in Georgia's capital. Led by former mayor Walter A. Sims, the Black Shirts blamed unemployment on competition from black workers and "served notice" on Atlanta businesses to replace black with white workers. When its leaders were jailed for passing fraudulent checks, drunken driving, and tax evasion, the organization unraveled—but not before it focused national attention on the New South city that later prided itself on being too busy to hate.[43]

Throughout the 1930s Atlanta was the southern city most visibly engaged in the persecution of dissident blacks. In the most celebrated

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[42] Donald E. DeVore, "The Rise from the Nadir: Black New Orleans Between the Wars, 1920–1940" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1983), 12–42, 124; Norrell, "Labor at the Ballot Box," 7; Clarence A. Bacote, "The Negro in Atlanta Politics," *Phylon*, XVI (Fourth Quarter, 1955), 342–43; Augustus Alven Adair, "A Political History of the Negro in Atlanta, 1908–1953" (M.A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1955), 39–50; and Bunche, *Political Status of the Negro*, 300, 485. The last two sentences of this paragraph are paraphrased from Roger Biles, "Robert R. Church, Jr. of Memphis: Black Republican Leader in the Age of Democratic Ascendancy, 1928–1940," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XLII (Winter 1983), 372.

[43] Snell, "Masked Men in the Magic City," 225; Barr, *Black Texans*, 139; New York *Times*, November 27, 1939, sec. 1, p. 7; John Hammond Moore, "Communists and Fascists in a Southern City: Atlanta, 1930," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXVII (Summer 1968), 444–53; Edwin Tribble, "Black Shirts in Georgia," *New Republic*, LXIV (October 8, 1930), 204–6 (quoted phrase on p. 205); and Charles H. Martin, "White Supremacy and Black Workers: Georgia's 'Black Shirts' Combat the Great Depression," *Labor History*, XVIII (Summer 1977), 366–81.

cases the city charged the "Atlanta Six" and Angelo Herndon with violating an obscure 1866 black code that prohibited "attempting to incite insurrection and circulating insurrectionary literature." The plight of someone like Angelo Herndon might become a *cause célèbre*, but for countless thousands of other blacks arbitrary violence and subjugation remained everyday reminders of their inferior status. Blacks in the Iron City referred to their hometown as "Bad Birmingham," in reference to Police Commissioner Eugene ("Bull") Connor's brutal legions. Police homicides proliferated there, and "resisting arrest" became one of the leading causes of the high mortality rate among the city's blacks. The Memphis police had a similar reputation, enhanced by such episodes as the killing of black postman George Brooks in 1938. Police sergeant A. O. Clark fatally shot Brooks after a white women, whose name the authorities had not bothered to ask when recording her complaint, accused the letter carrier of annoying her. His superiors quickly exonerated Clark. Though violence against blacks transpired less frequently in the other five cities, blacks complained of their poor treatment at the hands of local authorities. The absence of more violence gave testimony to the fear and hopelessness that pervaded the black communities of that era.[44]

In such a benighted atmosphere, the New Deal understandably made few inroads, and southern-based federal bureaucrats did not launch unpopular reform campaigns. Southerners feared the New Deal's reputation of being liberal on the issue of race, even though Roosevelt initiated few efforts designed specifically to aid blacks and his administration's celebrity can best be attributed to the unofficial efforts of a few activists such as Harold L. Ickes, Aubrey W. Williams, and Eleanor Roosevelt. As in areas like politics and labor, local administrators exercised considerable autonomy in the application of New Deal programs and policies. For example, lack of enforcement of the National Recovery Administration's (NRA) "color-blind" provisions became legendary. Southern businessmen argued that whites had always received higher pay and termed the prevailing NRA wage scale much too generous for blacks. Long before the U. S. Supreme Court dismantled the NRA, many Memphis employers simply disregarded the codes' mandatory equal pay for the races. In Atlanta the Chamber of Commerce and the purportedly progressive Committee on Inter-racial Cooperation took the

[44] Walter Wilson, "Atlanta's Communists," *Nation*, CXXX (June 25, 1930), 730–31; David Entin, "Angelo Herndon" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1963), 21–61; Charles H. Martin, *The Angelo Herndon Case and Southern Justice* (Baton Rouge, 1976); Dorothy A. Autrey, "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Alabama, 1913–1952" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1985), 65, 124–29; Bunche, *Political Status of the Negro*, 493–94; and Houston *Informer*, March 26, 1932.

lead in establishing a wage differential based upon race. In desperation, Atlanta's black Chamber of Commerce acceded to a two-tiered scale but hoped the bottom rate would be raised to a more acceptable minimum. The Atlanta *Daily World* sardonically called the NRA the "Negro Removal Act."[45]

Blatant discrimination also characterized the dispensation of New Deal relief and public works jobs. Despite Roosevelt's executive order and administrative guidelines barring racial discrimination in the WPA, local agents openly paid black workers less than they paid whites. In 1935 Atlanta's average monthly relief award to whites was $32.66 and to blacks $19.29; Houston gave whites $16.86 and blacks $12.67. Certification officials in Birmingham commonly turned down black applicants after intensive questioning found them undeserving. In Houston and Memphis officials registered blacks only when all white applicants had been provided for. The Memphis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) inveighed against the Civil Works Administration officials' practice of assigning black women to homes of personal friends for domestic work as a prerequisite for receiving aid. The Memphis branch of the National Youth Administration (NYA) basically limited its job training programs for blacks to domestic work in response to the cry that "good help" was becoming increasingly hard to find.[46]

Segregation also proved unassailable by New Deal agencies. Many programs enforced separation, as did the WPA in its sewing rooms and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in its camps. The inchoate public housing program preserved residential segregation first under the aegis of the PWA and, subsequently, under the U. S. Housing Authority (USHA). All six cities began construction of public housing projects during the 1930s and designated at least some of them for black occupation. No question ever arose about the suitability of segregated housing units, but implementation of the program aroused some controversy nevertheless. In Houston black homeowners with houses located in the way of federal public works projects had no recourse but to accept from the government a fraction of the

    [45] Gloria Brown Melton, "Blacks in Memphis, Tennessee, 1920–1955: A Historical Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington State University, 1982), 148–49; Ann Wells Ellis, "The Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1919–1944: Its Activities and Results" (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgia State University, 1975), 294–98; Michael S. Holmes, "The Blue Eagle as 'Jim Crow Bird': The NRA and Georgia's Black Workers," *Journal of Negro History*, LVII (July 1972), 277–79; Atlanta *City Builder*, September 10, 1933; and Atlanta *Daily World*, August 17, 1933.
    [46] Howard, *WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, 292; Ruth Durant, "Home Rule in the WPA," *Survey Midmonthly*, LXXV (September 1939), 274; Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 547; Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation*, 37; SoRelle, "Darker Side of 'Heaven'," 138–39; and Biles, *Memphis in the Great Depression*, 94 (quoted phrase). Also see Edward Lewis, "The Negro on Relief," *Journal of Negro Education*, V (January 1936), 73–78.

value for their property; if they refused, the government leveled the structures anyway to make room for improvements. Despite PWA and USHA housing contracts' stipulations that blacks be employed in construction, local authorities failed to honor the agreement. Site selection was unsettling and stressful for blacks. Birmingham blacks protested their exclusion from decision making, especially regarding the construction of the Smithfield Court project for blacks. In Memphis authorities razed a black neighborhood to erect whites-only Lauderdale Courts and destroyed one of the city's finest middle-class black enclaves to build Foote Homes. The unilateral decisions regarding public housing confirmed what many black leaders feared—that the primary function of public housing was to maintain existing racial segregation rather than to address inadequate housing. Local officials set guidelines and implemented policies to reinforce existing racial norms—with little or no federal interference. Blacks continued to be second-class citizens in these six cities.[47]

The New Deal did not drastically alter life in these six southern cities. True enough, federally funded projects gave them a face-lift, as new buildings shot up downtown, and existing streets, sewers, and other public facilities received much-needed repairs. These largely cosmetic changes may have improved the appearance of the cities but apparently achieved little else. The New Deal worked through local city halls but exerted virtually no influence on who made policy in them. Alphabet agencies allowed the communities to maintain their minimal contributions to indigent care while federal relief carried the overwhelming portion of the burden. No increase in social welfare activity in these cities ensued to reflect an expanded commitment to relief. The abortive attempts of the CIO to establish a beachhead underlined the degree to which local authorities effectively opposed all that John L. Lewis's unions represented—the closed shop, black participation in the labor movement, collective bargaining, and, reputedly, radicalism. Blacks survived the depression in somewhat better fashion because of New Deal aid, but their status in southern communities remained unchanged. In short, President Roosevelt's policies presented southern community leaders with a "can't lose" proposition, the provision of emergency palliation with no strings attached.

Undoubtedly the New Deal had a great impact on some aspects of southern life. As historians Pete Daniel, Gilbert C. Fite, and Jack Temple Kirby have shown, federal programs initiated during the

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[47] Houston *Informer*, May 20, 1940; SoRelle, "Darker Side of 'Heaven'," 147–49; Robert C. Weaver, "Racial Policy in Public Housing," *Phylon*, I (Second Quarter 1940), 153–54; E. W. Taggart (president, Birmingham NAACP) to J. C. DeHall, May 4, 1936, James M. Jones, Jr., Papers; and Biles, *Memphis in the Great Depression*, 94–96.

1930s revolutionized southern agriculture. Because of the incentives established by New Deal farm programs, plantation tenancy evaporated, sharecroppers deserted the land, and modern mechanized farming steadily enveloped the region. And as economist Gavin Wright has persuasively argued, New Deal legislation like the NIRA and the Fair Labor Standards Act, along with work-relief programs like the WPA, raised southern wage levels and thereby nudged the region into the national labor market. These significant changes notwithstanding, the New Deal had fewer repercussions in the region's cities. Curiously, given the South's longtime status as a rural-dominated region, the cities proved more resistant than the country-side to the forces of change loosed by the intrusive federal government in the depression era. In the urban South the forces of conservatism successfully resisted—at least temporarily—the challenges to traditional political, social, and economic conditions.[48]

As this study suggests, it would be an oversimplification to ascribe the erosion of southern cities' distinctiveness to the impact of federal government policies of the 1930s. If Goldfield and Tindall were correct in suggesting that unintended changes came later, then when did the transformation occur? In *The Burden of Southern History* C. Vann Woodward referred to the astounding growth of southern cities as the "Bulldozer Revolution" and pinpointed the takeoff of Dixie's urban boom to the 1940s. To be sure, the federal government played a significant role in that development during and after World War II by the location of military installations, shipbuilding yards, and other defense-related concerns in the region's moderate climate. Federal policies doubtlessly contributed to the enrichment of the South's cities and to the hegira of modern-day homesteaders from the North's declining metropolises southward. Accordingly, the 1940s does appear to be a likelier candidate for the crucial decade of change. The federal government's impact on southern cities in the 1930s can best be understood in conjunction with the findings of recent New Deal scholarship; that is, the paucity of change was caused by the strength of entrenched elites, the staunch commitment to traditional values and institutions, the political impotence of the have-nots, and President Roosevelt's limited agenda for reform. In short, it was hardly what historian Carl N. Degler characterized the New Deal as being: "a revolutionary response to a revolutionary situation."[49]

[48] Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana and Chicago, Ill., 1985); Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865–1980* (Lexington, Ky., 1984); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920–1960* (Baton Rouge, 1987); and Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York, 1986).

[49] Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1960), 6; and Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces That Shaped Modern America* (New York, 1959), 416.